OPTIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FORM

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT NUMBER: OR-035-04-10

BLM Office: Baker Resource Area **Lease/Serial/Case File No.** ---

Proposed Action Title/Type: Bassar Diggins Deferred Maintenance

Location of Proposed Action: WM, T. 11S., R. 44E., sec. 19, SE1/4NW1/4. Wells Basin Allotment. Also see maps attached.

Applicant (if any): ---

Conformance With Applicable Land Use Plan:
This proposed action is subject to the following land use plan.
Name of Plan: Baker Resource Management Plan **Date Approved:** 7/12/89
Ironside Rangeland Program Summary (RPS)(1981)

These plans have been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

Remarks: The project area is within the Lookout Mountain Geographic Unit. Bassar Diggins is to be maintained and developed as use warrants.

Need for Proposed Action: Plans for Bassar Diggins were developed in 1977. In 1980 a vault toilet building was installed. The primary purpose of the project is to maintain the recreation site which has been deferred due to budget constraints. Maintenance includes replacement of the old toilet that has drainage problems, is not a pleasing experience, and is not ADA accessible. The project would replace the buck & pole perimeter fence that is in disrepair and does not prevent livestock impacts within the camp site. The project would remove a livestock water trough within the camp site which has been identified as a public health and safety problem. A potable water hand pump would be installed. Other recreation amenities such as fire rings and tables may also be provided for an enhanced recreation experience.

This area is part of the Wells Basin allotment (#01070) and has historically been grazed by livestock within the camp site and riparian area. The site includes a riparian area in poor condition. The riparian area is in early seral condition with skunk cabbage and other annual species along with some shrubs species.

A new fence would exclude livestock from the camp site. The permittee that runs livestock in the Wells Basin allotment will be responsible for maintaining the new fence. The permittee that runs in the Soda Creek allotment will maintain the existing fence on the east end of the exclosure.

General Setting: The project is within and around an established BLM recreation camp site. It is located about 25 miles southeast of Baker City and 11 miles east of Durkee. The headwaters of Sisley Creek runs through the parcel and is the water source for the existing spring box, water line, and trough. The Lookout Mountain Road runs near the recreation site with an improved single-lane access road leading into the camp. The project area location sets within a mountain site type at 5500 feet elevation (see attached map).

Description of Proposed Action: The proposed action is to replace and improve recreation facilities at Bassar Diggins. The existing toilet building and vault will be removed from the site. A new single, unisex pre-formed concrete facility will be installed slightly down slope from the existing toilet. Fill material will be placed to elevate the facility somewhat, creating a positive drainage pattern for snowmelt and surface runoff.

The existing stock trough will be removed. The existing spring box and water line will continue to be utilized to provide a gravity feed hand pump with chlorinator. The water source will be tested and is anticipated to provide potable water for the recreation site.

Approximately one mile of lay-down range fence will be constructed around the perimeter of the recreation site (see map). Minimal clearing will be required. This fence would tie into the existing pasture boundary fences on the north and east side and in some spots would follow where the buck and pole fence was located. The fence would be constructed from new materials and be a four strand barbed wire lay down fence. Bottom strand would be at least 16 inches from the ground. The top wire would be no higher than 42 inches and the middle wires would be 16 inches between them and one wooden stay between each metal post. All posts would be installed approximately 16 feet apart. Rock jacks or figure fours would be placed where needed. Removal of existing vegetation along the fence line would be allowed. All project components would be constructed following BLM fence project specifications. Existing roads would be used for travel to and from project site. Both permittees will sign a cooperative agreement for maintenance responsibilities of their portion of the exclosure fence.

If funds are available, improvements to the recreation site will include two additional camp sites, new fire rings and tables, boulder placement as traffic barriers, and minimal site leveling.

Alternatives: The only alternative to the proposed action considered is No Action, in which case the recreation amenities would remain the same and the existing facilities would continue to be used. Under this alternative, the proposed fence project would not be constructed and livestock grazing would continue in the camp site area.

Environmental Impacts:

Critical Element	Affected		Critical Element	Affected	
	Yes	No		Yes	No
Air Quality		x	T & E Plants		x
ACECs		x	Tribal Concerns & Treaty Rights		x
Cultural Resources		x	Wastes, Hazardous/Solid		x
Environmental Justice		x	Water Quality, Drinking/Ground		x
Farmlands, Prime/Unique		x	Wetlands/Riparian Zones		x

Floodplains		x	Wild & Scenic Rivers		x
T & E Animals		x	Wilderness		x
T & E Fish		x			

The project does not lie within the bounds of any special management areas (Wilderness Study Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern etc.).

Description of Impacts:

Cultural Resources: A cultural resource inventory was conducted and no cultural resources were found in the vicinity of the old vault toilet and trough. Scribed aspen more than 50 years old will be avoided and ground disturbance will be avoided for any identified archaeological sites. Replacement of the vault toilet and installation of a hand pump will be monitored for cultural resources. Additional cultural resource evaluation and avoidance measures will be developed and completed prior to implementation of any new recreation site facilities or improvements in the vicinity of known sites.

Riparian vegetation: Native upland vegetation includes conifers, shrubs, and grasses. A site examination has revealed that there are no special status plants present within the project area.

The proposed action would exclude or minimize livestock grazing within the riparian area, and should improve riparian vegetation diversity and the overall ecological condition. Some riparian planting may be needed to accomplish this task.

Other vegetation: Vegetation within the recreation site is quite dense except within one camp site and on roads. Construction activities for toilet installation, fence building, water pump installation, and camp site leveling will destroy vegetation. There will be a loss of ground cover, mostly grass species, and a few native brush and small trees will be removed.

Forestry: An aspen, mixed conifer forest stand is present within and adjacent to the project area. Minimal clearing will be required for fence alignment. Trees which are determined to pose a safety risk within the camping area will be removed.

Soils: Tolo-Dogtown complex, 12 to 35 percent north slopes Tolo silt loam, 50%; Dogtown gravelly loam, 40%; Tolo soil derived from volcanic ash over older loamy mixed colluvium; Dogtown soil in colluvium and residuum derived from guartz diorite and granitic rocks.

Water Resources: A spring box and pipeline provide gravity fed water into a livestock watering trough in the campground. The trough has an overflow which spills onto the ground creating a muddy site of approximately two feet in diameter. The water than flows over a steep embankment and reenters the Sisley Creek drainage. The trough is located outside the riparian area and prevents the watering of horses and livestock directly out of the stream. This spring water system has been in place for many years and some people visit the site specifically to enjoy the water even though it is not intended to provide water for human consumption.

The project would eliminate this trough and replace it with a hand pump for potable water. There will be a reduction of sediment delivery by elimination of the overflow drain. Public health and safety concerns will be eliminated by providing a quality potable water system. Regulations prohibit all types of livestock within developed recreation sites due to manure, vegetation damage, and public health concerns. Having the livestock trough within the site is inconsistent with the objectives of this regulation. Elimination of the trough may cause an increase in shoreline impacts due to horsemen taking their animals directly to the stream for water. Signs will be posted encouraging owners to

utilize the hand pump water and buckets to water their horses. Horses will not be allowed to graze within the enclosure.

Installation of the hand pump may cause an increase in overflow from the spring box. This may in turn create a situation that is prone to attracting animals and humans, negatively impacting the spring area. This will be monitored and, if impacts occur, a fence will be built around the spring.

Wildlife: The area provides habitat for deer, elk and other species typical of a forested, high elevation ecosystem. The project area is designated range for mule deer and elk. This area is designated as bald eagle habitat. Wildlife species in the area include big game species, predators, raptors, and songbirds. Big game hunting is the primary recreational pursuit within the Bassar Diggins camp site.

There would be some temporary short-term disruption in wildlife activities and some frightening away by the general commotion during construction. Long-term disruption may increase slightly as it is expected that improvements in the camp site may attract more use and therefore more human disturbance. There would be an insignificant and temporary loss of wildlife habitat and forage with the loss of vegetation.

Fisheries: The headwaters of Sisley Creek are located within the recreation site. The headwaters are represented by a small perennial spring and the upper stream that most likely do not support native redband trout. A steep portion of Sisley Creek precedes this area that does not allow migration into the upper headwaters. Effects on the fishery habitat in lower Sisley Creek are related to effects on water quality and quantity. If sediment is produced, there could be an effect on the habitat. Any such production is expected to be minor and short-term. As soon as the project is completed, water quality would quickly clear up. No trees will be taken that provide shading to the stream.

Livestock management & forage: All of the project area is within the Wells Basin grazing allotment. The recreation site is currently surrounded by a “buck & pole” fence which is intended to keep livestock out. The buck & pole is too susceptible to blowdown and winter snows requiring significant maintenance on an annual basis. It is in disrepair and has not been functional for many years. Construction of a new “lay down” barbed wire fence will be more effective and maintainable, but will also enclose more acreage. An exclosure will be created, eliminating livestock grazing.

Installation of the fence would reduce livestock dependency on the riparian area for water and keep them from congregating within the riparian area and camp site. This project should enhance the riparian recovery and allow the watershed to improve. Implementation of this project closely conforms with the Rangeland Health Standard Guidelines.

This project would improve the following resource values:

•Stream stability	•Water quality	•Stream flows
•Subsurface water supplies	•Terrestrial wildlife habitat	•Vegetative diversity
•Forage production		

The grazing allotment which includes the project area is scheduled to be grazed from July 17th to Sept. 30th this year. Project implementation could be occurring during the same period and may cause minimal conflict.

The recreation site is also affected by private horse grazing. Hunters often utilize the forage within the site while they are camping. The existing trough encourages this activity. The project would eliminate the trough and all livestock would be excluded from the camping area. CFR 8365.2-1(c) prohibits bringing animals such as horses into a developed recreation site.

Noxious weeds: The ground disturbance and loss of vegetation, along with equipment entering and exiting the area, would pose a threat that weed species could increase on the site and be spread to other areas.

Visual resources: The project area has a Class II visual quality objective. The objective of this class is to retain the existing character of the landscape. Since roads and recreation facilities exist, the project would not change the character. Class II objectives would be met.

Socio/Economic: The only benefit is to the recreating public who would have a more enjoyable camping area with potable water and decent sanitation facilities.

Cumulative Impacts: Cumulative impacts relate primarily to the assumption that improved recreation facilities will attract additional use. Therefore, incremental impacts added by human use will result in impacts to soil, vegetation, and water quality from those activities.

Impacts of No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, the project would not occur and the impacts described would not be realized. The recreation site would continue to be used and maintained as is. This would result in ongoing sanitation problems, as well as health and safety concerns regarding the water trough. With continued use of the current facilities, the toilet building would continue to degrade and impacts from grazing would continue. Little or no potential for site improvement is possible with no action.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts: The following measures should be applied to reduce or eliminate many of the anticipated impacts:

- Monitor impacts at the spring. If necessary, build a fence to protect the spring.
- Cultural resources will be avoided and vault toilet replacement will be monitored. Additional cultural resource evaluation and avoidance measures will be developed and completed prior to implementation of any new recreation site facilities or improvements in the vicinity of known sites.
- Apply standard weed control measures.
- Seed all disturbed areas with an approved seed mixture. This would reduce erosion and retard weed invasion.

There would be no impacts to the critical elements listed above. Minimum vegetation and soil disturbance would occur when installing the fence components and traveling to and from the work area. These disturbances would be held to a minimum as all work would be in compliance with project procedures. Following these procedures would decrease maintenance in the future and decrease current disturbance to the riparian areas ecological components.

In summary the project would not have a significant impact on the environment and the reduction of livestock aum's would be minimal. Positive impacts should better meet the management strategies and management objectives for this area. This project would help enhance the recovery of the riparian system in this area.

Persons/Agencies Consulted:
Livestock Permittees
DEQ for vault placement.

Preparer(s): Polly Gribskov – Outdoor Rec Planner, Gary Guyman – Range Conservationist

Environmental Coordinator: /s/ Todd Kuck Date: July 2, 2004

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS

On the basis of the information contained in this EA (OR-035-04-10), it is my determination that the proposed alternative and potential environmental and human consequences and mitigation measures does not constitute a major Federal action affecting the quality of the environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared. I have determined that the proposed action is in conformance with the Districts land use plan.

Penelope Dunn Woods — Date
Field Manager
Baker Field Office